

INTERVIEW WITH LARRY SMITH
BY JERRY FRENCH AUGUST 24, 2002
Also present Mrs. Smith

MR. FRENCH: I am doing an interview with an old friend, Larry Smith. Today is August 24, 2002. It's about quarter to three in the afternoon. We are sitting up at the Shurry Lodge up in northern New Mexico. Larry, if you would please tell us your story. I know that you worked for the service for many years. I know that you had an interesting career with the U.S. Air Force. It was probably the Army Air Corps, at that time.

MR. SMITH: Right.

MR. FRENCH: If you would just begin where ever and tell us your story, however you'd care to do it.

MR. SMITH: I'll start in like Jenny said I should. My dad always hoped that I would either go into the ministry or go into conservation work. He was quite a dedicated conservationist on a small farm. We had a maple sugar bush and there were just enough cows to keep me busy. My name officially is Lawrence Stanley Smith. I've been called everything since then. In the Air Force I was Smitty. I became Larry somewhere along in the Fish and Wildlife Service. And plenty of times I've been called Shorty.

I guess before I went into the ...I volunteered to be drafted so I could go with a friend into World War II. That didn't really work out very well because we got to the reception center on Long Island and he got called that his mother was having medical problems so he went home. Two or three days later when he got back, I was off to basic training for the Army Air Force. He later went into the Infantry and when we were flying B-29 bombers in McCook, Nebraska he landed on the shores of Normandy as an Infantryman. He had been a friend for all of our lives. He was finally hit by friendly fire thirty days after hitting the beach at Normandy. We managed to be college roommates after the war. I was in general Biology and I kind of majored in Biology and Agronomy where I got in to quite a few soil courses. I also took some Fishery courses. I graduated from Cornell in 1949. I stayed on for masters and got an assistantship with a relatively new professor who had graduated a doctorate several years before. He was a Canadian, and his name was Oliver Hewitt. He talked he into being his assistant, which was a real pleasant opportunity. I was able to get to know the staff at Cornell better and to attend some of the National Wildlife Conferences with him and the head of the department; Gustav Swanson who later ended up at Colorado State.

After I got my masters we didn't have an immediate offer of a job so we were home. I was taking a few extra courses to kill the time until I might have an opportunity for a job. We were home on Easter vacation when a phone call came from the Boston

Regional office of the Fish and Wildlife Service. They were wondering if I might be interested in a position as Refuge Manager at Monomoy Island, which runs south from Chatham on Cape Cod. Just prior to this I had sort of made a commitment to work on a summer job with the State of New York on an Atlantic salmon program on the lower Hudson Valley. But we jumped in to the car and went up to Chatham, Massachusetts. Luckily I spoke to the right person there. We probably would have turned around and went home. I heard that ten people had been there and looked at the job and didn't want anything to do with it. The property had been taken through condemnation by the federal government prior to the war. Post war, it sat there, and with no legal control you might say; it became a big playground for Chatham people and those living on Cape Cod. They would go down and fish and hunt. There was all kinds of illegal hunting and fishing. There was commercial fishing for striped bass going on which wasn't supposed to be taking place. We drove into town and went past the Methodist Church. It looked like the Pastor's home was next door. He was outside so we drove up. Later on, we learned that his first impression was that we were a young couple who were trying to see if he would marry us. I told him what I was there to see. We went up on the top of the Church steeple. When we looked out, we could see Monomoy Island across the little private property in between. He told me that there was one person in town who I really had to meet and that was Dr. Keane. He called Dr. Keane and a few minutes later, Dr. Keane rolled up in this old Model A Ford pick up. When he heard what I was there for, he said, "Shake the hand of the only friend you'll have in Chatham!" I guess these other ten people who came and looked at it didn't talk to the right person! We decided to take the job. My future supervisor in Boston, Arthur Miller had said, "You're in the shadow of the Regional Office. And if you have any problems that you can't get answered by phone just drive in." I became a Refuge Manager without going through being an assistant manager, like most people do today. I had four wheel drive rig on the island and one on the mainland. And there was a boat and a motor to get back and forth. The first day, the local Massachusetts Game Warden, Red Madden, had sort of been using our vehicle to patrol the beach now and then. He took me down for my orientation trip on the island. He showed me where to get the best oysters and a few things like that; soft shelled clams and cohogs. From then on, I was pretty much on my own. I was the only full-time employee there for the two years I was there. It was a tough life in the community. Everybody in the community was wondering why the government had to take this [land] away from them. There were probably thirty cabins on the island and only one piece of property that officially had a deed to it; that was a lighthouse area at Monomoy Point. There were several big Coast Guard buildings up at the north end where we kept our vehicles. There was one at the middle that had deteriorated. And at the south end, there was a gigantic storage building and a very massive living quarters where the Coast Guards had been stationed. All of these were ours to use in any way we could see fit or want to. Some of the places had places to camp out and stay over night. We had so much fun. I know one time I thought, 'jesus, the sun's getting awful low!' I didn't have a watch. The day got away so fast! I was having so much fun; I didn't know where the time was going!

I got home pretty late. By the time you park a vehicle, get a boat and get to the mainland and get home, it takes quite a while.

There were of course lots of interesting incidents there. The first time we crossed over, there wasn't a pier. We later got use of a Coast Guard marine railway building to keep the truck in, and to leave my boat at. You had to pull the boat up on the shore. I learned about tides pretty quick. When it was time to go home I two hundred feet of sand to drag the boat through to get to the water! We got into the heavy equipment, which was brought in from Brigantine. We made some dams across some tidal pockets and dug some ponds in some low inland swale areas that are still ponds today, which is interesting. We were there for two years and I'd say we did develop some close friends but by and large....I had joined the Chatham Band and at some of these social events, it kind of got on you after a while because everybody was always saying, "Why did the government have to take this property?", and all of that. I hired a college student and an old fisherman as laborers. I should have kept some of the stories that the fisherman told. They could have been printed in a book after he died. The college friend is now retired. His parents owned one the cabins that we had to take away from them eventually. He is writing for the paper and volunteering for the Cape Cod National Seashore. He says now what a wonderful thing it was that the government took that land. After living through two years of unpleasantness with the local people, they realized finally that it had been the correct thing to do.

MRS. SMITH: One day this very nice looking man came to the door. He started haranguing about his cottage down on the island and about how it had been taken away from him. I listened for a while and then I got kind of angry. I don't know what I said to him, but come to find out, he was the Regional Director in Boston. And he had come down to invite us out to dinner. He was almost afraid to tell me who he was after that!

MR. FRENCH: Larry, you said you played in a band. What kind of instrument did you play?

MR. SMITH: The clarinet. We had a great band there. I guess after I left there, I don't know if I ever play again. Maybe once or twice for Church. We had a marching band and went to Moore Farm on Field Days and things. They had a bandstand in the park in Chatham. Every Friday night or something like that, there was a massive crowd. The town just filled with tourists and lots of people would come and sit on the grass.

MRS. SMITH: It was well enough know that it was featured on Public Television later; since we've moved.

MR. SMITH: The Regional Supervisor called one day and wanted to know if I'd like to move farther west. He wanted me to go to the Montezuma Refuge at the north end of Cayuga Lake in central New York, and off we went. By that time, we had had a little son

named Rodney. We moved to Montezuma in 1953. That was an assignment that I really enjoyed. There were nice working conditions. The Refuge was well accepted in the community. One interesting thing was the gigantic Muskrat harvest that was possible there in those marshes. The land had been worked on. At one time they had tried to farm it and didn't make it. The land was kind of sold to the bank or something and the government purchased it for...I don't remember the fee now. But for five years during the years of World War II, the Muskrat harvest off of that equaled the acquisition cost of the Refuge! To manage the cattail, you had to manage the Muskrats. You counted the houses in the wintertime from the ice. You estimated probably five muskrats per house or something like that. You determined how many you could get. We had share-trappers. They got half the fur and we hired a temporary guy who took care of skinning all of the animals, our half of the animals anyway. He also took care of stretching them. The trappers took care of their own skins. It resulted in a real high quality fur that went for auction. We also used the muskrat meat packed in brand new wooden bushel baskets. It was shipped by railway express to Baltimore, Maryland where they were sold for food. It was amazing. I think some years there were four or five thousand muskrats that we trapped. Even then, we weren't keeping up with them eating out the cattail. But then, Carp got into the pools. There was one large main pool and another storage pool of about equal size; maybe three thousand acres each, or something. The New York Thruway was being built just as we arrived there. The fill was right there across the main pool marsh. That was kind of a hard thing to live with. The contractor on that...they had started with another Manager and then had to deal with me. They were trying to pull all kinds of shenanigans like using our dikes to shorten their haul route to get to where they wanted to carry the fill. Meanwhile, these dikes had been made out of...they had a core of marl which was the nearest thing they had to something waterproof to prevent water from going through them. They were covered with deep muck, or black muck soil that was very soft on top. These dump trucks were beating that down and we had a constant battle with them. The last thing that held the Thruway from opening was the bridge over the Seneca spur line from the main barge canal down the Cayuga Lake and over to Seneca Lake. The big bridge across the Hudson had been built and finished and they were chaffing to have Governor Dewey open the highway by driving the whole length in a convertible. The road is about four hundred miles, I guess, from New York to Buffalo. We went down to watch the engineers sweating to finish. It was supposed to be concrete. But in order to open the highway on time, they blacktopped this bridge. It was quite a massive bridge, really.

MRS. SMITH: Suzanne was only about a week old and I drove down and watched Governor Dewey go by and waved to him as he went by.

MR. SMITH: She parked on the overpass and watched him come across the Refuge. They built a big fence on each side of the Thruway crossing to try to keep the deer and so forth from being too much of a problem. As years went by we could begin to see some dips and so forth in the road!

We did quite a bit of share cropping for leaving the share of corn or millet or something for the birds. I remember the year we had to control the carp breeding. We had to drain the main pool and treated the burrow pit areas with rotenone. We had more dead fish there than you could *ever* imagine! It's a good thing we weren't near town. We did that one year and the storage pool another year, I guess. But we had all of these exposed muck flats. The cattail had been eliminated essentially. There was one interesting thing; there had been an area of water in use called the 'goose pond area' out in the middle. For the first time walking out on these flats, we came on mounds of little stones with a little nick on each side. We found out that those were sinker stones from nets that the Indians used to fish there. We were hand-seeding millet with these cyclone seeders while walking on snowshoes on the mud. We hired a small airplane to scatter millet. That fall we had a crop of millet and one of these old muskrat trappers whose name was Lester Helmer knew his ducks. We were standing by the HQ one night and two little ducks go by. He said, "Oh, that's the first time I ever saw and Blue winged teal flying with a Wood duck!"

From Montezuma, we went west. My supervisor asking me if I had given any thought to where I wanted to go next. I said, "Yes, the Bison Range". We had circulating reports like that. So he said that he had had that idea too but it was eight miles west at the new Oak Orchard Wildlife Refuge. The deal there was that they were going to acquire one hundred and twenty-one private parcels of the swamp and woodland area that would comprise twelve thousand acres. There was a State area of five thousand acres on the east side of it already in existence for several years. At that same time, the State was acquiring the Tonawanda Game Management area on the west side, which would be another six thousand acres or so. It would be close to nineteen thousand acres all together there, or a little more than that. When we moved there, they probably owned ten properties of which two had residences or farm building and houses. The Supervisor told us to make one our home and one the office. We tried the drinking water in both places and then it was a drawn conclusion of where we were going to live because of the poor water in one place. We were in the middle of the swampland on a sandy knoll so we did have a shallow well that provided pretty good water. The property that we used as an office was soon used by four or five engineers working for Realty on surveys. One or two Realty people were there for a big share of the time. Charles Edsit, and a fellow names Stolby, and another guy who went to Washington; I can't think of his name. We were essentially doing housekeeping for them as far as maintaining the office for these folks. They transferred a maintenance man in from a Refuge in Massachusetts for somewhere who was a maintenance man who could do; he couldn't repair automobiles, but he could do fence work and that type of thing. You probably remember Hal O'Connor?

MR. FRENCH: Oh yes.

MR. SMITH: Well, Hal's start with the Service was with me. He was a real go-getter. He was quite puzzled at the title of Maintenance Man for Oddie Olson. Finally, he kind of figured that, 'well, he does fence work and this and that, so I guess you can call him a maintenance man!' Harold was a go-getter. We had more direct contact with Martin Redway who was an Assistant Regional Supervisor who was out there frequently. And after spending a day with Harold, when we were back the office, the two of us were talking together and Martin said, "You know, some day we'll probably both be working for him!" It came true for me. When I moved to Albuquerque, he was Deputy Regional Director. So that's the way it goes. It took a number of ...we were involved in the master planning of the thing. There was a Dale Sutherland from Boston who was out as more of a Biologist. Paul Steele was in the Boston office at that time. Paul would be out for a week and back in Boston for a week. He was working up things for the engineers and things. So over a period of time we did produce a master plan for the Refuge, which was quite detailed. Part One was part of a visionary thing and Part Two was all the engineering stuff. When the Job Corps came in, they decided to put a Job Corps Camp on the Refuge. We figured our master development plan would probably cost a million dollars. They spent a million dollars building the Job Corps Camp and then we had to try to develop a Refuge with these unskilled youth. But they hired a staff of something like thirty-five people who were working with these 135 youth who they brought in. They were mostly from big cities like New York and they were scared of the frog sounds and so forth out there. We had some pretty capable people working with them; the heavy equipment operators and carpenters and so forth. Actually, before that started, I got in on a bonanza of heavy equipment that we were going to need to develop the Refuge. Camp Drum up north of Watertown, NY. We had seen something advertised and I went up and met a Colonel. When he found out what we needed on the Refuge he was real enthused about trying to help us out. We got two D-6 bulldozers. He said that he'd pin and bush them before you get them, and that he had a lot of people that needed the experience so we got two D-7, two D-6, a D-4 and a Bucyrus Erie half yard drag line with a shovel front and a back hoe front and all of that stuff. All I had to pay was for two brothers who were local to go up there and get it for us. We had all of this equipment sitting outside of what had been an onion storage building. There had been tracks that were farmed on the refuge in the muck soils. We had quite a sizable building and improved it. Outside of it was all of this heavy equipment and people were wondering what was going to happen. Then Olsen one day was complaining, "We've got all of this stuff here and I can't even find a shovel!" The Job Corps went over pretty good with the local public. Then, Johnson's anti-poverty program got hit with poverty so the Job Corps went out. Next, the New York State Narcotic Addiction Control Commission decided they could use it. They would spend a certain amount every year on materials for them to work on the Refuge. We ended up building; with the Job Corps and with this crew quite a number of impoundments, dikes, control structures and so forth. They were people were the kind that their staff had to worry about working with these inexperienced kids and stuff. They had brought in a bulldozer from Moosehorn Refuge that had gone through the ice. They brought it in to be torn all apart and put back together. I remember

one of the said, “Mr. Stothers, it’s only got one gear forward!” He was asked, ‘How many gears backwards?’ and he said, “Three!” They had to take the transmission out and turn in around! They got into building a lot of Wood Duck boxes for other refuges. They also built fiberglass canoes that were transferred out to other refuges.

I had quite some experiences with various assistant managers. I had Arthur Miller as a Supervisor I guess through half or more of my tour there. We finally went to his retirement down at Brigantine Refuge. Art had sent me three different people, which he said, “You got to get rid of these guys.” Why somebody else had to get rid of them, I don’t know.

MR. FRENCH: Yes, I know the problem.

MR. SMITH: One of them, about the first thing he did was turn a truck over on curb. We got him a job as an Earth Science teacher at a parochial school.

MRS. FRENCH: I don’t know what kind of teacher he was.

MR. SMITH: He was a better teacher than he was a Refuge Manager. We had a chap that you knew just wasn’t going to make the grade, and George Gavutis was with us at the time. He was a good man. He and I had a talk with him one day and convinced him that this wasn’t his place. He ended up in the Coast Guard. There was Art Pelletier, who followed be at Monomoy Refuge after two or three other people, and got into some trouble there. They sent him to me and whenever Art Mallory would phone, he’d ask me if Art Pelletier was there. I’d tell Art that Mr. Mallory want to speak with him. No...it was Tom Horne at that time. Tom Horn wanted to speak with him. Horn was very outspoken and hard to live with. Paul even agreed to that. Paul had worked for him at Malheure. Well, it was out on the coast. The first time I met Paul when he came in the office I said, “You’ve worked for Tom before, and you came to Boston to work for him again?” He said, “Yeah, I did it anyway!” It was Tom Horn who wanted to talk with Art Pelletier on the phone. He was the one that sent me the three [guys he wanted to get rid of]. He got under Art’s skin and Art finally just quit. I had several crackerjacks; Ed Moses, George Gavutis, Tom McAndrews, they all ended up...three of them were Regional Supervisors in Boston. And there was Hal O’Connor.

MRS. SMITH: It was considered a training station and a place to get rid of people!

MR. SMITH: I had them all for about a year. I would begin to lead the easy life with them running the show, and then they were gone! We were there for fifteen years. We built a whole new HQ and combination Visitors Center/Office, big storage buildings. The day we would have moved into the new office I was transferred out. Ed Moses was working in the Boston office. He called me in early 1973 and said that they wanted to transfer me to Great Swamp. I had no wish to go there. Finally Dick Griffith, the

Regional Director called and told me I could plan on my paycheck going to Basking Ridge, New Jersey and that I'd better plan on having the kids there to start school. Then I even started to try and get a job in Washington. I had tried for Smiley's job when that was advertised. We made the move to Great Swamp. We had lived at Montezuma for five years without the nearest neighbor. And at Iroquois we were in the middle of the swamp with no neighbors in sight or sound. Even at Great Swamp we were in a beautiful brick home but there was nobody nearby except for the sheep pasture across the way. That was a kind of a messy assignment in a way. They had too many Assistant Managers for one thing. David James was the top dog and assistant lion there. He kind of ran the show for the short time we were there. They had been trying for two or three years to have a deer hunt. There was a browse line through Great Swamp Refuge that anything which could reach on their hind legs was eating. Great Swamp had been...they had been planning a new airport for the metropolitan area, actually, my son flew down in a private airplane and he said that as soon as you took off, there were the Twin Trade Towers right there! Most of the time the wind was west to east, but if it ever turned back there was a yellowish cloud of pollution from New York City that would drift over the area.

MRS. SMITH: It was such an experience area to live in. If we hadn't lived on the Refuge, we couldn't have afforded to rent a place!

MR. SMITH: A lot of the old timers there had to sell their places because they couldn't pay the taxes. It was a nice community and all. Meanwhile with all of these applications I had; Paul Steele called one day and said, 'Hey, would you like to come to Albuquerque?' He had known me from Region 5 and I asked him what the job was. He told me it was the Biologist job for the Region. Bill Refault had held the job and was transferred. He must have gone to Washington at that time. He'd been earlier in Federal Aide before that. I told Paul that I'd get my application right in and he told me not to worry and that I had an application there already! So we said yes! Then Bill Nelson and Dick Griffith got into a discussion. Dick Griffith said, "We just spent money sending him to Great Swamp!" Finally, Dick relented and said that if I would stay through the controversial deer hunt, he can go. So we went out house hunting at about Thanksgiving time in 1973. I think the deer hunt was scheduled for the first of December. The crew there had been through this for two years already, so they had drawn hunter's names, I guess working with the State. They had probably 150 hunters. They had been blocked by a court order for the two previous seasons. The Regional Director was going to be in court on the night before the hunt. Meanwhile, we'd had several game agents and local and State people in; the local police on a training session about how we were going to run this hunt. They were going through First Aid and all of this. Then, at five o'clock before the hunt, the Regional Director, Dick Griffith called and said that it was off. The court had ruled against them again! The next year, they finally did pull it off. They've had them ever since. And occasionally it's enough to keep the deer under control.

So we were free to move out here just as that gasoline thing struck. [1970's fuel shortage]. I bought a new gas can to keep full of gas for the drive across the country. The goods left just before we did. I guess we had to use that gas getting in to Indianapolis in a blizzard before we got to stay with the Hullecks that night. I got the can out of the trunk and put it in. We made it, but at no place for the rest of the drive would they let me fill the can. If you put it in the car, they'd think you were storing gas.

MRS. SMITH: We did manage to get to Jerry and Arlene's but I don't know how.

MR. SMITH: When we were house hunting, Jenny didn't like the looks of the country. We were in the White Winter Rock Motel there. She'd be kicking me in the middle of the night; "How could you take a job out here without looking at it first?!" Half way through the week, Mark Nelson wanted to take us out to supper. He met us at the Hotel and took us out. She was as dour and glum as could be.

MRS. SMITH: I hadn't slept for about three nights!

MR. SMITH: I heard later that when he got back to the office that he didn't think we were coming. But we did. I was in that slot for I don't know how many years before they made me the Migratory Bird Coordinator. I was put on the first Whooping Crane recovery team in 1975. Well, in early 1975, that was our second year there Mark called me into the office right after Christmas and asked me if I would have any objections to working in Washington for a week. I think it was three weeks. I went in that was the team. There was one from each Region working with people there on an environmental statement for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Well, we learned right off quick that this was going to be three weeks in two weeks home, for the rest of the year. And between the elevation and time difference and everything else... Nobody was doing my work while I was gone. Every three weeks, the in box was full! That had to be taken care of so it was an interesting year, but it was a fun crew to work with. We had John Carlson who is deceased now, but he was the leader of our group. We had such a problem working with local minority typists that I got stuck one weekend trying to supervise two colored gals who were typing parts of the Statement. I would correct them and hand them back. The corrections were made, but there were new mistakes. We gained zero during the weekend! John said, "Let's see if we can get a couple of gals that I know from the Minneapolis office!" We got two crackerjack gals, and at just that time we got into word processing equipment and boy, did that begin to go smooth. They didn't make many mistakes and if there were, you could correct them on the machine.

MR. FRENCH: I guess that's about the time when I got to know you. Let's say in 1976, or 1977.

MR. SMITH: I brought John over; it may have been before you were at Bitter Lake. He came out for a visit and we hit Bosque and Bitter Lake. We had to go through a public

hearing thing on this draft Statement. Albuquerque was one of the meeting places and at that time my predecessor as Southwest Refuge Supervisor was a chap that had come from actually he had been in Federal Aide. He was real interested in doing a good job. He made a real good statement for the record when we had the public meeting with a court reporter and all that type of stuff. That about ended it for me. One year of that. Later that year, they asked me to be on the recovery team. Mark moved to Washington somewhere in that time. Gordon Hansen was my Supervisor and he got all upset by the fact that he thought I could have had a chance not to be on the recovery team. I thought it sounded kind of interesting. Dave Olsen was the leader at the time and there were some interesting people on that. There was Dave Blankenship and Hal Irby of Texas. Dave Rosslock of Nebraska representing a migration state and Ray Ericsson representing the research people. It was a great experience working with them for about three years. It was good getting to know Ray that well. The Whooping Crane Conservation Association had a meeting in 1980 in Miami. Several of our team were down there reporting to the Association, including Ray. They were reporting where we were at in this draft plan.

Side B

MR. FRENCH: During this time Larry, you also took on the job of being the southwest representative for the

MR. SMITH: Not 'til after I retired.

MR. FRENCH: Oh, is that right? For some reason I thought it was then.

MR. SMITH: I don't anybody would take it while they were still employed. Part of your job is being critical of some of the things going on.

MRS. FRENCH: We almost moved to Alaska somewhere along in there.

MR. SMITH: Kenai Refuge came up. I tried for it and I guess I was accepted, but I guess we had learned enough about prices of things in Alaska, and Gordon Hansen didn't want me to go.

MRS. SMITH: He offered him a raise in grade.

MR. SMITH: I got a grade raise out of it!

MR. FRENCH: That's not a bad thing! Is that about the time you became the Migratory Bird Coordinator?

MR. SMITH: Yeah. In 1980 Dave Olsen, wanted off the team so they made me team leader. So that was a little more extra work. I had to arrange for all of our travel and

meetings and that type of thing. We had them probably twice a year at that time. It went on through about 1984. I decided to retire. And that took place on July 1, 1984. I continued being the Whooping Crane leader through that year and part of the next, in retirement actually, before they brought Jim Lewis in. He was a good selection.

MR. FRENCH: Just for the transcriber's information, when we began this, I failed to introduce Mrs. Smith, Jenny. So transcriber, if you hear other voices in here that was Jenny helping us through these conversations. Larry, there are very few people in this Service who receive awards. I think that for the record I'd better put in there that you received the Meritorious Service Award. Was that before, or during your retirement?

MR. SMITH: It was applied for before I retired. But I was called back for an awards meeting by Mike Spear for the presentation. I had several awards there in Region 5. I forget just what they call some of those.

MR. FRENCH: I know that one of the things we worked closely on with you was when I was at Bosque del Apache, we used to run those hunter training courses. You had set those up by digging probably through your personal files. It was an outstanding program that you had set up to train those hunters to qualify before a hunt.

MR. SMITH: I think if I ever deserved an award, it was for that. Gordon wasn't one much for giving awards! I wasn't retired very long before Forrest Carpenter was on the phone. There was a fellow who was getting to be a pretty old man, I can't think of his name, who had been serving. He came from a different discipline than Refuges, so agreed to that. Jerome Pratt, who was involved with the Whooping Crane Conservation Association. While I had been going to their meetings for several years; they were normally at the North American Wildlife Conference, but then that kind of came to and end. You had to register for the whole Conference just to come in for one day to attend the meeting. At the Washington meeting, there were a lot of people from Patuxent who wanted to come in. They didn't feel like they wanted to pay the whole registration fee for the whole program, which was too bad, but we started having meetings at other places. It was usually some place of interest like down at Rockport. They have a Whooping Crane festival. Then, during the period that we got involved with this Idaho to Bosque Whooping Crane situation of putting eggs under Sand hill Cranes. I worked with Rob Durrin for several years on that, which was pretty much a disappointment. At one time there were thirty birds in the flock. They were getting killed by power lines and being taken by Eagles. But I guess in the final analysis on that was that being raised by Sand hills they were so fouled up in their vocalizations that it didn't work out.

MR. FRENCH: They failed to attract the opposite...the mate.

MR. SMITH: It's too bad that some of the later things like leading them down by ultralight couldn't have been continued. That's a whole other story. Other than that,

having been in the Service [Army Air Corps]; in the late 1980's all of a sudden the members of our group began to find each other and we have an association that organized an official legal entity and continued on. I rapidly became the Historian for that group. I was nineteen and turned twenty when we were overseas, so I was one of the younger people.

MR. FRENCH: Just for the record, were those B-29s that you were flying?

MR. SMITH: Yeah, they were B-29s. We were flying missions from the Marianas Islands to Japan which was three thousand miles over water every trip. It was interesting, and I've ended up writing the history book for the group. It's interesting that while I was in the military over there, our group commander I could describe him, or liken him to the military equivalent of God, or something like that. We could go home after thirty-five missions, which we survived. And because we had an airplane commander that was conservative, and a flight engineer who had been trained a Boeing; he saved our bacon three times on just what he knew about the airplane. The navigator never went to sleep on a mission. Those were all pluses.

MR. FRENCH: You were fortunate to have a crew like that!

MR. SMITH: It was eleven men and it was a pretty tight knit group for a year and a half. As a crew, there was no difference between officers and men. The airplane commander would listen to me or the tail gunner or anybody that thought he ought to know something. If it was worth something, and for our good, he'd do it.

MR. FRENCH: Well Larry, before we conclude this I have to tell you, I have to admit; I used to have a lot of fun with you. I knew that you road a bus from Albuquerque home.

MR. SMITH: Yep.

MR. FRENCH: And I didn't do it too often, but about once every two weeks, I'd wait until about three thirty and I would call from Bitter Lake and start talking about all of the things that were going on with the Snow Geese. And I would rattle on, and rattle on and rattle on, knowing that the bus was getting closer. Pretty soon, he'd [Mr. Smith] would say, "You know, I've got to go catch my bus!" And I'd say, "Okay, Larry, we'll finish this story another time." I'd go for about two weeks and then I'd wait until about three thirty some afternoon and call him just out of pure devilment! [all laughing]

MR. SMITH: Now I know!

MR. SMITH: Well Larry, I thank you and Jenny very much. It was a good interview. I've got a lot of information in there. I will send this in. A transcriber will sit down with it. They will produce a written copy and I will go through and make corrections. Then

I'll send it on to you for your corrections and completion. Then we'll send it back. That way the tape is kept on a permanent record in our oral history file. The written record will also be there. I'll catch you some time tomorrow and we'll do a written release. It's just a signature thing. Right now, I'm going to call this quits.

MR. SMITH: Okay.